

Japanese Treasures

The Art of Netsuke Carving





Japanese Treasures

The Art of Netsuke Carving
in the Toledo Museum of Art



Carolyn M. Putney

FIRST EDITION

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Title Page: Warrior and helmet, unsigned, 2000. (cat. no. 34).

Page 4: Reverse of manju with reishi, including the signature of Kokusai, 1948.118 (cat. no. 43).

Page 6: Kunisada Kochoro (1786–1864), "Takano Tama River at Kinokuni Province and famous Kabuki Actor, Kinokuniya Tossho," detail. From the series *Six Famous Kabuki Actors and Six Famous Tama Rivers*, 1835. Woodblock print, h. 15 1/4 in. (38.7 cm). Gift of Richard R. Silverman, 1991.82.

Page 12: Hokusai Katsushika (1760–1849), "Gentleman at Rest," detail. From *Yehon Tzuzoku Sangoku-shi*, vol. 7. Woodblock print, h. 8 5/8 in. Gift of Nohle Kreider, 1944.10.

Page 16: Manju with pine bark and leaves, 1948.124 (cat. no. 37).

Page 20: Kappa ryusa, 1948.126 (cat. no. 16).

Page 46: Detail of Raiden, 1948.140 (cat. no. 15).

Acknowledgments

The enthusiasm, dedication, and vision of three people inspired this exhibition and catalogue: Kurt T. Luckner, former director David W. Steadman, and Richard R. Silverman. Kurt and Richard took great care to make seeing the entire collection of netsuke possible for our visitors, while David was responsible for planting the idea of creating this show.

I would like to thank all of the marvelous donors who contributed to making the exhibition a reality, including Mrs. Edward A. Kern, Mr. and Mrs. Robert L. Huebner, Dr. Samuel Karr, Dorothy Zurheide, Richard R. Silverman and Robert F. Phillips. I owe a huge debt of gratitude to the Museum Director, Roger M. Berkowitz, who eased many burdens in facilitating and supporting the creation of both this book and the exhibition. I also thank the many members of the incredible staff of The Toledo Museum of Art who have made possible the preparation and execution of both book and exhibition. In particular, I acknowledge the following Museum personnel: Todd Ahrens, Jeff Boyer, Claude Fixler, Angie Hyatt, Betsy Kelsey, Sandra E. Knudsen, Lee Mooney, Anne O. Morris, Lawrence W. Nichols, Mary Plouffe, Karen Serota, Rochelle Slosser, Davira S. Taragin, Judy Weinberg, Patricia J. Whitesides, and my own staff, including Kathy Gee, Julia Habrecht, Nicole Rivette, and volunteer Mizuho Saito. Finally, a huge debt of gratitude goes to my primary editor, Richard H. Putney, and editors Sandra E. Knudsen, Timothy A. Motz, and Richard R. Silverman, all of whom helped refine and shape this catalogue. It is hoped that by showcasing this little-known part of the Toledo Museum collections, a better understanding of this remarkable art form and of the culture that demanded its creation, will inform and excite our audiences.

This book is dedicated to my wonderful mother and my dear husband, who through their love and encouragement made me believe I could do anything I set out to do.

Carolyn M. Putney, *Associate Curator of Asian Art*

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A Pronunciation Guide



Reverse of cat. no. 43.

Pronouncing Japanese is not difficult if you follow this easy guide.

The vowels, a, e, i, o, and u are pronounced as they are in most Romance languages (especially Italian).

a as in father

e as in bet

i as in machine

o as in only

u as in assume

Two vowels together (diphthongs) are usually pronounced as follows:

ei as in reign

ai as in aisle

In spoken Japanese, vowels are often omitted or slurred, so netsuke is pronounced "net-skeh."

Most consonants are pronounced as they are in English, with a few exceptions. G is always hard as in "get." R is pronounced closer to the sound of L. N can sometimes sound like NG, except at the beginning of a word. All syllables are stressed equally.

Courtesy of Richard R. Silverman

Preface

Personal adornment can be the most innovative, sophisticated, and extravagant of the arts. The people of Japan created some of the most opulent personal accessories during the Edo Period (1615–1868) in order to attach pouches and purses to their elaborate silk clothing. Japanese artists invented the miniature sculptures known as netsuke as fasteners to serve this fashion impulse among the luxury-loving citizens of the urban centers of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Japan. The Japanese have collected netsuke for centuries, and since the late nineteenth century, western collectors and museums have ardently sought these tiny treasures of wit, whimsy, and craftsmanship.

The Toledo Museum is fortunate to have an excellent collection of netsuke. The first example was received in 1926 from W. P. Baker (cat. no. 36). Since that time, three remarkable donors have substantially created our collection, which now totals more than 250 netsuke (plus 94 intro and 91 ojime), 50 of which are showcased in this book.

- Noah H. Swayne and his wife were instrumental in expanding the Museum's netsuke holdings. Mr. Swayne (1847–1922) was a prominent Toledo lawyer and civic leader and the son of a United States Supreme Court justice. His wife Frances donated 23 of their netsuke to the Museum in 1928 and 1929, works most likely acquired during their several trips to Japan.
- Harry Fee, a successful member of the Adrian, Michigan, business community, vastly expanded the collection with important gifts in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Mr. Fee (1868–1955), with his father, publisher of the *Adrian Daily Times*, started the Adrian Electric Light and Power Works in 1890. He retired in 1938 as manager of the Commercial Savings Bank of Adrian. A noted philanthropist, he founded Hidden Lake Gardens in Michigan's Irish Hills. Assembling a large collection of Asian art, most of it acquired during annual vacations in California, he donated a significant body of works to the Museum that included Chinese ceramics and Japanese lacquer as well as many netsuke, ojime, and intro.
- In recent years, the generous donations of Richard R. Silverman, one of the most prominent collectors of netsuke in the world, have significantly increased the size and quality of our collection of Japanese art. A native of Toledo and a graduate of Brandeis

University, Mr. Silverman has committed his life to teaching, writing, and lecturing on the arts of Japan. He began collecting while residing for sixteen years in Japan and is a member of the board of directors of the International Netsuke Society. His devotion to the Toledo Museum of Art includes not only gifts of rare glass netsuke (e.g., cat. no. 24) and other Japanese decorative arts but also the generous sharing of his knowledge of this specialized field. With this exhibition, we are particularly pleased to be able to announce his most recent gift to the Museum, an extraordinary two-part, early nineteenth-century netsuke of a warrior wearing a helmet (cat. no. 34). Mr. Silverman has also helped edit this catalogue; for that, and all his support of this exhibition, we are deeply grateful.

In 1990 our entire collection of netsuke, intro, and ojime was installed for visitor enjoyment and study in the Asian art gallery by Kurt T. Luckner, curator of ancient art, with the expert assistance of Richard Silverman and Carolyn Putney. Visitor response to this appealing display encouraged additional talks and programs, culminating in the proposal that an exhibition feature our masterpieces and include materials to provide some social and historical context. The Museum is indebted to Carolyn M. Putney for conceiving and developing the exhibition *Japanese Treasures: The Art of Netsuke Carving in The Toledo Museum of Art* (April 18–June 11, 2000). Several institutions and individuals kindly loaned objects: the Cleveland Museum of Art, Oberlin College, and a private collector from New England. The exhibition was made possible by a grant from the Lila Wallace–Reader's Digest Fund Museum Collections Accessibility Initiative at The Toledo Museum of Art. Additional support was provided by Mrs. Edward A. Kern and Mr. and Mrs. Robert L. Huebner.

Publication of this book, which captures and shares the delights of the exhibition, was made possible by a gift from Mr. and Mrs. Robert L. Huebner, with the assistance of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. We hope that focusing on this choice but little-known part of the Toledo Museum of Art collection will promote both understanding and enjoyment of this intimate art form and the sophisticated culture that created it.

Roger M. Berkowitz, *Director*



What are Netsuke?

Japanese artists cleverly invented the miniature sculptures known as netsuke to serve a very practical function. Traditional Japanese garments—robes called *kosode* and *kimono*—had no pockets (see ill. pp. 6 and 9). Men who wore them needed a place to keep personal belongings such as pipes, tobacco, money, seals, or medicines. The elegant solution was to place such objects in containers (called *sagemono*) hung by cords from the robes' sash. The containers might take the form of a pouch or a small woven basket, but the most popular were beautifully crafted boxes (*inro*), which were held shut by *ojime*, sliding beads on cords. Whatever the form of the container, the fastener that secured its cord at the top of the sash was a carved, button-like toggle called a *netsuke* (see ill. pp. 8 and 19 for two matching sets of *inro*, *ojime*, and *netsuke*). Such objects, often of great artistic merit, have a long history reflecting important aspects of Japanese life.

This introductory chapter outlines the historical forces that gave rise to the Japanese tradition for *netsuke*, and briefly examines the social context in which they functioned. The second chapter describes major types of *netsuke*. The third focuses on the artists who made *netsuke* and their working methods and materials. Finally, a brief catalogue examines fifty of the finest examples of *netsuke* currently owned by the Toledo Museum of Art.

Historical Background: The Edo Period

Although experts cannot determine the precise date when *netsuke* were first used with any precision, the time in Japanese history that witnessed the highest demand for their production was the Edo Period (1615–1868). Many aspects of this important era fed the Japanese demand for elegant luxury goods, including *netsuke*.

“Edo” was the name of the capital city of Japan established by warlords of the Tokugawa family in the early 1600s (see map p. 8). Today we know Edo as Tokyo, which remains the center of government. Prior to the founding of the new capital, Japanese society was led by emperors residing in the city of Kyoto; however, their power had paled compared to that of the feudal warlords known as *shogun*. The latter were heads of powerful military families who, from the twelfth century onward, became the effective rulers of Japan. Struggling to expand their power, they weakened the authority of the emperors, who became rulers in name only.

Just before the emergence of Edo in the early seventeenth century, Japan suffered from ongoing, devastating warfare between powerful military families. The most powerful of these clans was the Tokugawa, whose *shogun* was Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616). (A note to the reader: Japanese family names are written first, their given names last; therefore Tokugawa was the family name of the individual named



Ieyasu.) Between 1603 and 1615, he ended the chaos of civil war by subduing his rivals, reunifying most of the country, and setting up his new administrative capital in Edo. As the residence of the emperor and his imperial court, Kyoto remained steeped in tradition; as the real center of power, Edo soon began to rival the old capital in terms of cultural achievement, and far surpassed it economically.

The Japanese Class System

Shifting patterns of wealth, a rise in urbanism, and new trends in artistic production accompanied the emergence of Edo. Traditional Japan had a class system, based upon the ideas of the Chinese philosopher Confucius. At the summit of the social organization was the emperor and his extended family; below them came the very powerful warrior class of samurai, composed of the shogun of Japan, his feudal lords (daimyo), and other feudal retainers. Wealth was based upon the holding of land. The lords were given huge estates, collecting their large income in the form of rice produced by farmers (no), who formed the next level down on the social scale. The lowest, called chonin, was composed of artisans and merchants; the latter were considered the lowest class because they did not produce any tangible products useful to society. (Ordinary workers, called eta, were considered to be outside of the class system entirely.) Although these social divisions remained in place throughout the Edo Period, merchants stood at the center of the new economic expansion. Their increased wealth, combined with several other social trends, was to change the face of Japanese society and expand the range and quantity of artistic production.



Netsuke-ōjime-inro set with monkeys holding peaches; see cat. no. 17

The Rise of the City of Edo

Before the city of Edo was established, art had been totally controlled by the emperor's court, the shogun, and the religious communities. The rapid growth and commercialism of the new capital city, plus the absence of the imperial court, made art popular and available to all levels of society. Men and women of all classes became interested in art forms such as painting, calligraphy (which in Japan was closely related to painting), music, and games of skill such as archery. Indeed, personal enjoyment of the arts became a main pursuit of society in Edo and other urban centers. The artistic contrasts between the two cities were already quite apparent in the seventeenth century. Kyoto remained traditional and conservative, and the luxurious art forms created there were based on Japan's literary and artistic past. Tastes in Edo were much more forward-looking and modern by comparison, and innovation in art was much admired. By the eighteenth century, Edo was the artistic center of Japan, creating works related to the pursuits of its newly rich and growing class of chonin.

An important reason for Edo's rapid growth was the shogun's law, passed in 1634, of sankin kotai. This law required the feudal lords—daimyo—to set up large homes in Edo as well as to maintain the estates in the countryside that were their seats of power. This system was devised to keep the feudal lords from accumulating wealth and power that might be used to oppose the central government from afar. When the daimyo visited their country estates, their families were required to stay in the city as virtual hostages. The many servants and vassals required to serve the families of the lords, but who were forced to leave their own families in the countryside, served only to fuel the desire for pleasure-seeking activities in the city. Areas in each city were set aside as "pleasure quarters," which had theaters, shops, restaurants, and geisha houses (see ill. pp. 10 and 11). Geisha were professional female dancers, singers, and entertainers. The establishments they worked for ranged from the most elegant places of entertainment to houses of prostitution.



Kimono (Meiji Period, 1880–1900). Painted silk, h. 66 in. (168 cm).
© Oberlin, Ohio, Oberlin College, Allen Memorial Art Museum AMAM
1969.72. (Photo: John Seyfried, 1999.)



Citizens of Edo watching an outdoor drama. Detail, festival scenes: pair of six-fold screens. Matabei School, Edo Period (1615–1868). Ink and color on gold ground paper, h. 20 1/4 in. (51.5 cm); w. 82 1/4 in. (208.9 cm). © Cleveland, Ohio, The Cleveland Museum of Art; The Kelvin Smith Collection, given by Mrs. Kelvin Smith 1985-.279.1-2

Another factor that contributed to the explosion of city life in Japan during the Edo Period was the connecting of the four major urban centers by highways and waterways. New roads linked each of the cities to the rural areas of Japan and to each other; this promoted more efficient inter-regional trade and helped break down the old feudal ways of life. In the cities, wider ranges of information, a vast variety of goods, and leisure pastimes became available to all classes of society, not just the elite.

Connections to lands beyond Japanese shores also fed the remarkable flourishing of the arts in Edo Japan. In the 1630s, the shogun prohibited Japanese citizens from traveling abroad. In spite of this enforced seclusion of the population, contact with the outside world was maintained

through the port city of Nagasaki on Deshima Island. Foreign traders, especially Chinese and Dutch, brought goods and materials necessary to the Japanese economy; imports included materials such as ivory used for the production of netsuke. Traditionally, much of Japan's aristocratic culture had been based on that of China. Thus, the maintenance of trade with China kept Japanese artists and craftsman in touch with Chinese myth, folklore, and imagery, which they incorporated into their own work.

Ukiyo-e: The Lure of the "Floating World"

All these social changes led to an urban life focused on the pleasures of the moment. Surprisingly, the new attitude had roots in Japanese religious traditions. Ancient Buddhism had referred to the illusory nature of material experience as *ukiyo-e*, which literally means "pictures of the floating world." This term refers to the Buddhist concepts that the world is only an illusion and that life is just a transient state that lasts for a moment. In the Edo Period, this spiritual notion of transience was transformed into a more secular one. In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Edo society, people in such urban centers as Edo, Kyoto, Osaka, and Nagasaki actively pursued luxury and the "illusory" pleasures of the senses provided by the arts. Paintings, woodblock prints, and the decorative arts, all associated with the new meaning of *ukiyo-e*, were in high demand among collectors (see ill. p. 12). People no longer wanted reminders of the traditional past but instead wanted images of their lively surroundings, favorite actors and entertainers, and popular scenic tourist spots (see ill. p. 6).

In sum, Edo Japan was characterized by a population that was increasingly literate and wealthy and that had more leisure time on its hands. Never before had so many citizens participated in social and cultural activities. These included the popular form of theater, Kabuki; festivals celebrating nature and folk traditions; painting and poetry parties; and tea ceremonies. Even the *eta*, those outside of and below the class system, could enjoy the pleasure quarters of Japanese cities. Edo's affluent merchants and artisans

(the chonin) became urban sophisticates, whose ambition was to perfect the art of living well. This group was among the wealthiest in the country, but its members remained officially in the lowest and least privileged class. Having no political power, they expressed themselves by disobeying the government's sumptuary laws, which prohibited the spending of huge sums of money on food and luxury items such as silk garments.

Fashion as Status

In spite of official disapproval, fashion was a supreme measure of status and taste in the cities. Wealthy men spent fortunes on their clothes and those of their wives. The textiles created for these citizens are among the most spectacular ever made. Men generally wore more subdued patterns than did women, but they could further display their taste through the choice of elegant accessories such as inro and netsuke, which they suspended from beautiful sashes (see ill. pp. 6 and 18). A rich gentleman owned many of these garments and accessories, some appropriate to the season or the occasion, some simply for conspicuous display. Thus, every major urban center supported a number of lacquer makers and netsuke carvers who specialized in the production of the fashionable accessories that are the subject of this catalogue.

The Discovery of Netsuke in the West

In 1853/54, Commodore Matthew Perry visited Japan with an American fleet and opened the country to foreign visitors. Within a generation, western influence led many Japanese to abandon traditional dress, resulting in decreasing demand for the production of netsuke. However, westerners found the miniature sculptures fascinating in themselves; they loved the satire and humor, so much a part of the Japanese national character and so often found in the carver's art. Individuals and museums began to acquire netsuke, sometimes with inro and ojime, sometimes without, a collecting tradition that continues.



Men visiting the pleasure quarters. Detail, festival scenes: pair of six-fold screens. Matabei School, Edo Period (1615–1868). Ink and color on gold ground paper, h. 20 1/4 in. (51.5 cm); w. 82 1/4 in. (208.9 cm). © Cleveland, Ohio, The Cleveland Museum of Art; The Kelvin Smith Collection, given by Mrs. Kelvin Smith 1985-.279.1-2



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Netsuke—A Variety of Types

The word netsuke literally means “root fastener” (ne = “root” and tsuke = “to fasten”). The compound word, first found in Japanese texts of the seventeenth century, hints at the origins of these objects as simple organic fasteners. Found objects such as gourds, shells, or twigs were attached to the end of a cord, whose other end was attached to a sagemono, or suspended object. In order to secure the hanging object, the wearer slipped the netsuke upward between the garment and its outer sash, allowing the netsuke to hang over the top of the sash (see ill. p. 6). The sagemono could be a tobacco pouch, a money purse, or the object that became most typical, an inro. Usually, inro were lacquered boxes with multiple compartments used to hold seals, herbs, and medicines. No one knows exactly when these containers came into common use, but some scholars believe that netsuke were used to secure an object to a sash as early as the fifteenth century. From relatively primitive beginnings, netsuke developed into a significant art form. By the Edo Period (1615–1868), fashionable gentlemen began to collect these accessories, which were made into elegant sets composed of netsuke, sliding bead fasteners called ojime, and inro (see ill. pp. 8 and 19).

Many elements went into the design of a netsuke that was beautiful and functioned well. It was most important that it have no projecting parts that could break off or snag the costly fabric of a kimono. (This rule did not apply to many later nineteenth-century netsuke; produced as independent works of art rather than to be worn, they could have more complex profiles with protruding parts.) Other requirements for a successful netsuke were to have a side that could lie flat against the sash and to be balanced so as not to hang in an awkward position. Intended for handling by its owner, a good example should have an appealing feel as well as a pleasing appearance. Displaying a netsuke to business acquaintances and friends—“showing it off”—was sometimes just as important to an owner as the actual function of the miniature sculpture.

The carving of netsuke became a highly refined craft among the artists who specialized in creating these miniature works of art. Categorized by their form and decoration, netsuke generally fall into the eight types illustrated on the following pages.



Manju

Probably the earliest type of netsuke, the manju is a carved, solid, round fastener named after a type of sweet rice bun of similar form. The silk cord that attached this type of netsuke to the intro is fastened by means of a metal ring on the top of the netsuke or by a hole punched through its back. (Manju with a Kabuki player. 19th century. Lacquer, copper, gold, and silver; d. 1 $\frac{5}{8}$ in. [4.1 cm]. Unsigned. Gift of H. A. Fee; 1948.129.)



Ryusa

This type is round like the manju but not solid. Instead, it has designs cut entirely through the netsuke to form openwork patterns, making it appear delicate and lace-like. The name derives from that of the artist, active in the 1780s, who invented this type. (Ryusa with bamboo and chrysanthemums. 19th century. Ivory and silver; d. $\frac{17}{16}$ in. [3.7 cm]. Unsigned. Gift of H. A. Fee; 1950.80.)



Kagamibuta

The round, "mirror-lidded" kagamibuta is a variation on the manju, named for its resemblance to a type of Japanese mirror. A metal lid, often elaborately carved, tops a shallow, carved and undecorated bowl. The knot of the cord is hidden in the hollow interior of the netsuke. (Kagamibuta with a bridge scene. Edo Period (1615–1868). Ivory and metal; d. 2 in. [5.1 cm]. Unsigned. Gift of H. A. Fee; 1950.103.)



Katabori

The most popular type of netsuke—generally considered the finest as well—is the small, three-dimensional carving called katabori, which means, "carved tooth." The fastening cord usually runs through two holes, called himotoshi, which were located so that the carving could be shown to its best advantage. (Katabori of a sennin. Mid 19th century. Boxwood; h. 3 $\frac{9}{16}$ in. [9.0 cm]. Unsigned. Gift of H. A. Fee; 1948.173.)



Sashi

This type of netsuke is an elongated form of katabori. The sashi is longer in order to tuck part of it into the sash, thus giving better support and balance to a suspended object of some weight. The holes (himotoshi) are located at one end of the object so that the cord will not interfere with the function of the netsuke. (Shoki, a mythical Chinese hero, fighting an Oni, a nasty Buddhist devil. 18th–19th century. Ivory; h. 3 ¹⁵/₁₆ in. [10 cm]. Unsigned. Gift of H. A. Fee; 1950.146.)



Mask

Netsuke in the form of masks are usually miniature copies of those worn in the forms of the Japanese theater: Noh, Bugaku, Gigaku, and Kyogen. Many mask netsuke were created in Edo because of the wild popularity of the theater there. (Mask of Ranryo, a mythical Chinese prince in ancient Bugaku court and temple dances, who was assured of winning battles if he wore this ferocious mask. Late 19th century. Boxwood; h. 2 in. [5.1 cm]. Unsigned. Gift of H. A. Fee; 1948.183.)



Trick

Trick netsuke have movable parts or hidden devices to delight and surprise. This netsuke appears to be a kaki, a type of persimmon, but it opens to reveal a minute ivory carving of Benten, the goddess of learning, music, and speech, seated under a pine tree. (Persimmon with concealed figure of Benten. 19th century. Sandalwood and ivory; h. 1 ¹/₄ in. [3.1 cm]. Signed: Kagetoshi. Gift of H. A. Fee; 1950.130.)



Hako

Made in the shape of a lidded box, hako netsuke are often carved out of lacquered wood, with inlays of a variety of materials. (Hako decorated with tatebina dolls. 19th century. Lacquer, inlaid with shell and gold foil; h. 1 ³/₈ in. [3.5 cm]. Unsigned. Gift of H. A. Fee; 1952.47.)



Materials, Artists, and their Techniques

Netsuke artists (netsuke-shi) usually carved their creations out of wood or ivory. They used woods indigenous to Japan, including cypress, boxwood, cherry, ebony, bamboo, and sandalwood. As ivory is not native to Japan, it had to be imported at great expense, primarily through China. Even when Japan was closed to the outside world from the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries, Chinese merchants were allowed to import ivory into Japan because of the high demand. Artisans also exploited substitutes such as marine ivory or walrus tusk.

Artists sometimes used other materials. Stag antler seems unusual, but there was a plentiful supply from Japanese deer (see cat. no. 43). It is considered one of the most difficult materials to use and is highly prized when carved well. Lacquered wood was popular, although it was more often used to make inro. Lacquer is the clear sap from the lac tree which, when dry, resembles the appearance and durability of modern acrylic; layer upon layer of lacquer could be built up, so that after it dried it could even be carved to create a very pleasing surface. Artists could also add color to lacquer, or even precious metals such as gold or silver for spectacular effects. Netsuke-shi could also enhance wood, ivory, or lacquer netsuke by applying inlays of mother-of-pearl, horn, brass or other metals, glass, or coral.

Occasionally, netsuke can be found fabricated entirely of metal. A rather rare material used was porcelain, with most examples made in the nineteenth century at the Hirado kilns on the southern Japanese island of Kyushu

(cat. nos. 35 and 40). The Toledo Museum of Art has several examples of another seldom-used material, glass (cat. no. 24). Also used but unusual were such novelty materials as dried seeds, fruit pits, nuts, semi-precious stones, animal bones, and even bird skulls.

Artists, Artisans, and Workshops

The first carvers of netsuke are anonymous, but it is generally thought that they may have been woodcarvers whose normal work was the production of small Buddhist shrines for individuals, or ivory carvers who made signature seals. Japanese metalworkers may also have been important in the early production of netsuke. Although they focused on the making of swords, in times of peace they often turned to work, like netsuke, that was more decorative. The first Japanese text to mention netsuke carvers by name is the *Soken Kisho*, a book of 1781 dealing with swords and their accessories. Written by Inaba Tsuryu, a sword merchant and dealer in antiques from Osaka, the book lists fifty-seven carvers, most from the major urban centers of Osaka, Kyoto, and Edo, but also a few from smaller provincial towns. Unfortunately, few signed works by the artists named in the book have been identified; this fact leads to the assumption that not many eighteenth-century netsuke-shi signed their pieces. An important reason was that it was considered very poor etiquette for an artist to sign a work made for the emperor, a shogun, or a daimyo. However, the signing of works apparently was more common in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.



Harunobu (1718–1780), "Two women and a man," detail. Back of Shoji partition (modern reproduction). Woodblock print, h. 11 ³/₈ in. Gift of H. A. Fee, 1953.162/71.

What is certain is that once an artist established himself as a competent craftsman, he set up a workshop, usually in conjunction with members of his own family. Such establishments often functioned for several generations. The Japanese class system encouraged this practice, because once a person was born into the artisan class, it was almost impossible to rise into another class. Artisans, who were usually men, tended to train their sons in the same occupation, thus passing it on from one generation to the next.

Occasionally, artists expanded their workshops into schools, training students from outside their families in the carving of netsuke. Whether inside a family or not, the social and stylistic relationships of master and pupil were very strong. A master sometimes allowed outstanding pupils the honor of using his name on a finished product, and a master's name was sometimes inscribed on any piece from his workshop. Also, workshops or schools sometimes imitated the style of a revered master carver of the past. While the copying of a work of a master by a pupil was not considered a dishonest practice, some carvers produced forgeries of great artists' works; thus, special care must be taken in the attribution of netsuke to specific masters. All these practices make certain identification of a particular artist's work very difficult. Today, even when we know the name of a specific artist, we rarely know details of his biography.

Possibly the most famous netsuke carver whose name is known and who is represented in the Toledo Museum of Art collection is the eighteenth-century artist Masanao of Kyoto (cat. no. 8). He is one of the artists listed in the *Soken Kisho*, where it reads simply: "Masanao from the capital Kyoto. He is skillful at carving ivory, wood, and other materials. He deserves high praise and recognition." We know virtually nothing else about him save the remarkable works signed by him or attributed to him by modern experts. However, his reputation for excellence is reflected in the adoption of the name Masanao by a long line of netsuke carvers stretching from his own day to the present. Indeed, the craftsmanship of the Masanao workshop of today is considered as fine as that of its namesake.

Tools and Techniques

The typical methods for creating netsuke involved the carving of raw materials such as wood or ivory. Each artisan created and used his own set of tools, an assortment of metal scrapers and drills. Putting all his energy into his work, the carver generally sat on the floor to keep his arms and hands as free as possible.

Usually taking a month or two to make a netsuke, a good artist went to great lengths to create an inspirational one. The process often began with the production of many preliminary sketches. Many specialized techniques were used by skilled netsuke-shi in executing the design. Engraving was necessary to add details to hair or to make inscriptions on a piece. Inlaying was often used to create eyes or patterns on a robe. Staining and painting were employed to add color to ivory or wood. Lacquering, as noted, was a very highly valued skill, and many complicated processes were necessary to create lacquer netsuke. Finally, metalwork was sometimes used in making netsuke, particularly the kagamibuta type, with its "mirror" or metal lid made of special alloys.

In the Edo Period, it was rare for a netsuke carver to make a good income, even for the most gifted artists. Living a meager existence subject to incessant demands, the artist received little public sympathy for the rigors of his work. As with many western artists of the nineteenth century, fame came to the netsuke-shi only after death. A case in point is one of the most famous artists represented in the Museum collection, Kokusai, who also signed his pieces as Koku (cat. nos. 16 and 43). Working in the second half of the nineteenth century, his real name was Ozaki Soyo. At age twenty-one, he entered the school of the master carver Gyokuyosai Mitsuina, where he studied ivory carving for four years. As a master himself, he specialized in carving Chinese-inspired motifs out of stag antler. In spite of his reputation for designing and fabricating extraordinary netsuke, he did not enjoy a lucrative livelihood. Instead, he became a professional comedian in order to pay for the education of his son Ozaki Koyo, who became a great novelist.

Today, netsuke are still produced as art objects by a number of Japanese craftsmen. However, some artisans from England, America, Australia, New Zealand, and Eastern Europe have taken up this fine traditional craft. (In the 1990s there were forty-four members of the International Netsuke Carvers Association. The older artist-members, such as Bishu, were Japanese; interestingly, nearly all the members under the age of forty were westerners.) Still able to delight the senses, netsuke retain powerful associations with the fascinating traditions of a magnificent Asian society.



Netsuke-oyime-intro set featuring Raiden, the thunder god; see cat. no. 15.





1 Emma-O

Mid 19th century

Wood and ivory; h. 1 1/4 in. (3.2 cm)

Unsigned

Bequest of Noah H. Swayne, 1922; 1927.117

Some Japanese Buddhists believed that after death the soul left this world and wandered through the next, which included a heavenly realm and several forms of hell. Along the way, the soul encountered stopping places where it was examined by various judges. Emma-O, the king of the underworld, was a much-feared judge who handed out punishments to sinful souls. In this work, Emma-O is shown boating on a lotus leaf, a Buddhist symbol of purity, with his book of judgment. A demon paddles the king along the stream Sanzu-no-Kawa, or "River of Three Choices." The choices refer to three possible destinations for the soul: hell, a return to earth as a beast, or continued wandering between heaven and hell as a homeless ghost.



2 Fukurokuju and a Chinese boy

19th century

Ivory; h. 1 9/16 in. (4.0 cm)

Signed: Masakazu

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1952.46

Fukurokuju is one of the Seven Gods of Good Fortune. Derived from the religions of Buddhism, Shinto, and Taoism, this group of immortals was established in Japanese popular belief toward the end of the 16th century. Fukurokuju brings fortune, wealth, and longevity to those who worship him. In his earthly life, he was Chinese—a scholar and wise man associated with the Taoist religion. In this image, he is immediately recognizable by his long, high-domed head and extremely short legs. He is shown with a Chinese boy, a reference both to his teaching and country of origin. Fukurokuju is also depicted on the matching inro flying on a white crane, his constant companion, which symbolizes long life.

3 Wandering friar

Early 20th century

Ivory; h. 1 1/2 in. (3.8 cm)

Unsigned

Bequest of Noah H. Swayne, 1922; 1927.114

This friar may be a member of the yamabushi, a group of itinerant Buddhist priests who as early as the eighth century went to the farthest reaches of Japan in order to spread the word of Buddha. They are given credit for drawing the earliest maps of Japan. He wears a wide woven straw hat to protect against wind and rain and holds a sake bottle in one hand and a scroll in the other. However, a similar netsuke in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London is identified simply as a sake seller. This type of netsuke is often called a trick netsuke because of the moveable tongue in the man's mouth.



4 Kinko Sennin on a carp

19th century

Ivory; h. 1 5/16 in. (3.3 cm)

Unsigned

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1948.144

The Chinese nature-based religion called Taoism was brought to Japan as early as the sixth century. Mountain wise men, known as sennin in Japan, were common subjects for the netsuke carver. This sennin is probably Kinko, who lived beside a river and was a painter of fish. One day a giant carp offered to take him for a ride into the realm of the immortals. He returned after a month, telling his followers never to kill another fish. He then jumped into the river, where he was transformed into a carp himself. Kinko is usually shown reading a Taoist scroll while riding on the back of the magical fish.





5 Gama Sennin with two toads

19th century

Ivory; h. 3 ⁷/₈ in. (9.8 cm)

Attributed to Masaka

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1948.162

This Taoist sage, named Kokensei, is known as Gama (meaning toad) Sennin because he is always shown with one or two toads. Even without the animal attributes, he can be identified as a sennin by the leaf apron he wears. There are several folk legends that explain his connection to toads. Some claim that Kokensei could turn into a toad at will, while others relate that the sage once cured a toad and toads followed him ever after.



6 Manju netsuke with Ryu Sennin

Early 19th century

Ivory; d. 1 ¹⁵/₁₆ in. (4.9 cm.)

Signed: Gyoku

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1948.156

One of the many magical powers attributed to Ryu (Ryu means dragon) Sennin was the ability to conjure up a dragon in his rice bowl. Dragons could dwell either in the sky or the sea and could carry individuals between heaven and earth, so the ability of the sennin to create a dragon was very impressive.

7 Sleeping Hotei

Late 19th century

Wood, ivory, and silver; h. 1 in. (2.5 cm)

Signed: Hoshu

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1948.166

One of the most popular of the Seven Gods of Good Fortune is Hotei, the god of happiness. His origins can be traced back to a Chinese Buddhist priest of the sixth century, but he became wildly popular in Japan. His happy round face, large stomach, and treasure bag, which often contains items of good fortune, help identify Hotei. Chinese children usually accompany him as well.



8 Reclining rabbit in a kimono

Late 18th century

Ivory and amber; w. 2 ³/₁₆ in. (5.5 cm)

Signed: Masanao of Kyoto

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1950.171

This is a rare image of a clothed animal by one of the best netsuke-shi of all time, the very famous Kyoto carver Masanao. While the rabbit is a familiar subject of artists and the fourth animal of the Zodiac, rabbits and hares are usually not shown in robes. The fact that this rabbit wears a monk's kimono leads one to believe that this is a representation of a character from the Choju Giga (Frolicking Animals) scrolls of the twelfth century. The scrolls were the work of Buddhist monks who made fun of their fellow clerics by portraying them as animals as they went about their daily activities and rituals. The art of ink caricatures was revived in the Edo period and cartoons, or manga, became a favorite genre for painters and netsuke-shi alike.





9 Seated Daruma

19th century

Ivory; h. 1 $\frac{7}{16}$ in. (3.6 cm)

Signed: Masanao (inscribed)

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1950.167

The original Daruma, also known as Bodhidharma, was the founder of Zen Buddhism. He was said to be an Indian prince who converted to Buddhism in the sixth century and then became a missionary to China, where he founded his religious order. He sat in meditation for nine years to draw attention to the Zen sect, and he withstood various hardships, like losing the use of his legs and cutting off his eyelids in order not to fall asleep. By the time this legend came to Japan, he had become rather a comic figure and is often shown in an irreverent manner. While this netsuke bears the signature of the famous carver Kyoto Masanao, another carver, without using the hallmark oval reserve around the name that would make it genuine, inscribed it.



10 Daikoku and Hotei as wrestlers

Early 19th century

Boxwood; h. 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (7.0 cm)

Unsigned

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1950.135

Two of the Seven Gods of Good Fortune, Daikoku and Hotei, gods of wealth and happiness, are both of Buddhist origin. The unusual cap identifies the top figure as Daikoku. The gods are placed in a contemporary context as two sumo wrestlers, a humorous touch that was quite common practice for netsuke-shi in the Edo Period.

11 Gama Sennin on a large toad

Mid 19th century

Ivory; h. 1 ¹⁵/₁₆ in. (4.9 cm)

Unsigned

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1950.143

Each of the Taoist immortals, called sennin, has a distinctive attribute. Gama's companion, the toad, always identifies Gama Sennin. This netsuke is unusual because the sennin holds large peach in his hand, the attribute usually associated with a different sennin, Seiobo, whose peach tree bore fruit that granted eternal life.



12 Three monkeys

Late 19th century

Boxwood with inlaid tortoise shell eyes; h. 1 ¹/₄ in. (3.2 cm)

Unsigned

Bequest of Noah H. Swayne, 1922; 1928.155

Sambiki-saru, the three Buddhist monkeys, known to us as "hear no evil, see no evil, and speak no evil," are symbols of virtue. Iwasaru covers his mouth, and Kikusaru covers his ears, while Misaru covers his eyes; there is a famous shrine to the three at the great temple at Nikko. The compact design of this netsuke is perfect; it has no protruding parts to snag the wearer's kimono.





13 Kagamibuta with Bashiko

Early 20th century

Ivory and silver; d. 1 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (4.7 cm)

Unsigned

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1950.115

Bashiko, another Taoist immortal, is considered by the Japanese to be the first veterinary surgeon. He supposedly lived in China in the years 2697–2597 B.C. and cured a dying dragon by operating on its throat. Bashiko is rarely depicted in art, while another Taoist sage, Chinnan, is more popularly shown with dragons.



14 Kintaro hiding behind a Tengu mask

Late 19th century

Wood; h. 1 $\frac{5}{16}$ in. (3.3 cm)

Unsigned

Bequest of Noah H. Swayne, 1922; 1928.151

Kintaro was a legendary boy who became lost in the mountains of Japan. He gained superhuman strength by wrestling with all the creatures of the forest. These included a tengu, a mountain deity that was part bird and part human. Kintaro took great delight in raiding the nest of a tengu, who fiercely protected it with his tremendous strength. Masks of the tengu were often used in one of the traditional forms of Japanese theater, Bugaku, which combined drama with dance.

15 Raiden

Mid 19th century

Ivory; w. 2 1/8 in. (5.4 cm)

Signed: Masatami

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1948.140

Shinto is the name given to the indigenous religion of Japan, having as its main deities all the elements of nature: the sun, moon, wind, tides, etc. Raiden is the god of thunder, who looks from a cloud to the earth searching for a place to throw his lightning bolts. He holds a stick for beating his drum, which creates the thunder men hear on earth. There were two netsuke carvers named Masatami. This is most likely by the earlier artist, who worked in Nagoya and carved mostly ivory figures.



16 Kappa on a cucumber boat

Late 19th century

Ivory and applied metal; d. 1 3/4 in. (4.4 cm)

Signed: Koku

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1948.126

A kappa is one of the many magical creatures and spirits that inhabit the woods and mountains of Japan. It is a small, furless creature that somewhat resembles a monkey but has an indentation on the top of its head that holds magical water. If the water is spilled, the kappa loses its powers. It lives in ponds, lakes, and rivers and thrives on the blood of drowned children. Kappa also have a craving for cucumbers, and people can satisfy them by throwing cucumbers into the water in the hope that the monster will eat the vegetable instead of feeding on humans. The artist Kokusai, who in this piece signed his name as Koku, cleverly created a cucumber vine in ivory and then placed a metal insert with the kappa propelling a cucumber as a boat in the center of the netsuke.





17 Monkey with peach

Edo Period (1615–1868)

Wood; h. 1 3/4 in. (4.4 cm)

Unsigned

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1950.86

Monkeys were very popular subjects for netsuke carvers. They are the ninth sign of the Zodiac, and people born under that sign are considered clever, good leaders, and problem solvers. Monkeys are often the heroes in folk legends and religious texts, but when shown with a peach they symbolize longevity. The peach is a Taoist symbol for immortality but can also represent femininity and peacefulness.



18 Lion (shishi)

Mid 18th century

Lacquer; h. 1 1/8 in. (2.8 cm)

Unsigned

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1950.78

This striking lion, or shishi as it is known in Japan, bears little resemblance to the ferocious king of the beasts with which we are familiar. The shishi looks more like a dog with fangs and a curly mane. The lion is an animal not found in Japan, and the image is based on Chinese and Indian models. They often appear in pairs at the entrances to temples as guardian figures and symbols of divine protection.

19 Dragon with coral

Mid 19th century

Ivory and coral; w. $1\frac{7}{8}$ in. (4.7 cm)

Signed: Genryosai

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1950.161

Genryosai, one of two Tokyo artists to work under this name, created this magnificent netsuke of the most powerful mythological creature in China and Japan and fifth animal of the Zodiac, the dragon. Although Asian dragons have no wings, they are able not only to swim the depths of the sea but also to fly. This dragon is set among clouds, clutching a huge piece of coral. Coral symbolized a rare and perfect thing.



20 Tiger

Late 18th century

Ivory; h. $1\frac{5}{16}$ in. (3.3 cm)

Unsigned

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1950.144

The Japanese learned about tigers from verbal descriptions and Chinese artists' depictions, since there are no tigers in Japan. When artists created images of tigers, they were merely caricatures of the mighty beast or images derived from local cats. Tigers are the third sign of the Zodiac, and people born under that sign are considered lucky, strong, and full of courage.





21 Sage riding a kirin

19th century

Ivory; h. 3 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (7.9 cm)

Signed: Gyokuju

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1950.141

A kirin is a mythological animal that originated in China and is sometimes referred to as a unicorn because of its single horn. It has the body of a deer, the tail of a lion, and the head and legs of a horse, creating a unique but gentle creature. Seeing a kirin in the clouds and surrounded by flames generally means a person of great importance, like a ruler or holy man, is about to be born. The kirin is considered the greatest of all mythological beasts and appears only every 10,000 years.



22 Taoist sage

19th century

Marine ivory; h. 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (5.7 cm)

Signed: Shogetsu

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1950.120

Although this figure of a bearded man has no significant attributes to help identify him, he is probably one of the numerous Taoist sages often depicted by netsuke carvers. When Chinese culture and religion were introduced into Japan in the sixth century, many of the legendary figures of Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism were adopted into Japanese beliefs. Taoist sages, who roamed the mountains and withdrew from civilization, were often considered magicians, and images of them were used as lucky charms.

23 Ashinaga and Tenaga with a fish

Mid 19th century

Wood; h. 4 $\frac{1}{16}$ in. (10.3 cm)

Signed: Doraku

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1948.161

The story explaining these strange-looking men can be traced to Chinese mythology, which maintained that a peculiar race of people lived on the coast of the Pacific Ocean. Ashinaga, the long-legged man, carries Tenaga, the long-armed man, into the sea where they can catch fish in deep waters. When shown together, they are a symbol of peaceful co-operation.



24 Suigaraake netsuke

Early to mid 19th century

Satsuma glass with gilt bronze mount; d. 1 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (3.5 cm)

Unsigned

Gift of Richard R. Silverman; 1984.102

This rare glass netsuke, made in the province of Satsuma, probably served as a personal ashtray for the wearer (suigaraake means tobacco ashes). The ornate gilt bronze, smoke-breathing dragon is quite appropriate and amusing considering the function of the object. Netsuke and inro were often combined with smoking paraphernalia worn at the waist. The bronze mount also serves as the attachment for the cord from the netsuke to the inro.





25 Three puppies on a roof tile

Late 19th century

Wood and ivory; w. 1 1/4 in. (3.2 cm)

Signed: Chokosai

Bequest of Noah H. Swayne, 1922; 1927.120

The pups depicted here may have a symbolic meaning, for much is associated with them in traditional Japanese culture. The dog was the eleventh sign in the Japanese Zodiac, and in folk tales was often honored as a deity. Japanese believed that dogs offered protection from evil. In addition, because dogs gave birth quite effortlessly, those desiring an easy childbirth often invoked them for help. Thus, this netsuke probably served as an amulet, perhaps one protecting the home.



26 Drum

19th century

Ivory; d. 1 3/8 in. (3.5 cm)

Signed: Kajikawa

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1948.117

Musical instruments are often depicted in netsuke, either by themselves or in the hands of a musician. In Japan, there are three forms of drum: plain cylinders, corded or banded drums, and dumbbell-shaped drums (called tsuzumi). This netsuke represents the second type, a banded drum.

27 Rat

19th century

Wood; h. 1 ⁵/₁₆ in. (3.3 cm)

Attributed to Masanao of Kyoto

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1948.181

This charming netsuke of a rat, with its tail wrapped around its body and held by its own paws, is typical of the style of a family of netsuke carvers named Masanao. These outstanding carvers specialized in creating images from nature in a realistic manner. At least eight members of this talented family worked in Kyoto under the same name from the late eighteenth century until the present day.



28 Kagamibuta with landscape

Mid 19th century

Ivory and metal; d. 1 ¹/₂ in. (3.8 cm)

Unsigned

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1948.169

This plain, ivory bowl supports a gilt gold metal disk with a landscape of a rustic cottage at the water's edge. Mt. Fuji can be seen in the distance with puffy clouds floating overhead. The cottage is not the home of an impoverished person and, in fact, could represent the hut of an aristocrat, who wanted the dwelling to appear rustic in order to harmonize with nature. If you look closely, you can see the shoji, or sliding paneled door, half open to reveal the interior of a room. The fact that the door can actually be slid open is very rare and is a great example of the artist's clever craftsmanship.





29 Manju with toys

Edo Period (1615–1868)

Ivory, lacquer, and iridescent shell; d. 1 $\frac{5}{8}$ in. (4.1 cm)

Unsigned

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1950.81

This delightful round netsuke displays a selection of toys on one face and a new moon and plum twigs on the other. The most prominent toy is an inuhariko, a brightly painted toy dog made of papier-mâché and usually sold at Shinto shrines as a protective charm for children. The Daruma toy, at the lower left, is like our Roly-poly toys that have weighted bottoms and always right themselves after being knocked over. Daruma is a well-known Buddhist priest who once meditated for nine years, sitting so long that his legs withered, leading to this comical depiction of him. Shuttlecocks, used in games, complete the group of toys. This netsuke may have been created for a young boy.



30 Seated monkey

Late 19th century

Wood with inlaid glass eyes; h. 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (3.8 cm)

Unsigned

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1950.150

The only monkeys native to Japan are small, with tan fur and short tails. All other types, such as baboons and the long-armed monkeys often depicted in art, are copied from Chinese models. This realistically carved monkey, biting the back of his hand, has no apparent symbolic meaning but is a delightful example of the carver's craft.

31 Manju with gold objects

19th century

Lacquer; d. 1 ⁹/₁₆ in. (4.0 cm)

Unsigned

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1950.113

The variety and symbolism of the gold objects depicted on this netsuke suggest that it was made for a boy. The top, paper crane, and toy carp all suggest a young child's interests, but the addition of the sword marks the advent of a young boy's coming of age. While cranes stand for peace, carp represent a boy's strength and strong will, for the fish are known to swim upstream and even up waterfalls, never giving up until they die. Boy's Day is a national holiday in Japan celebrated on May fifth.



32 Inuhariko

19th century

Wood; h. 1 ¹/₄ in. (3.2 cm)

Unsigned

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1950.104

Toy dogs, known as inuhariko, were originally made as boxes to be given to friends on a festival day. While they were often given to women as charms for an easy birth, they became very popular as good luck charms for children. Purchased at Shinto shrines, the brightly painted dogs, often made of papier-mâché, are supposed to capture sickness and danger in the hollow cavity inside the toy.





33 Court lady and gentleman with a poem card

Mid 19th century

Ivory; h. 1 $\frac{5}{8}$ in. (4.1 cm)

Signed: Masatsugu

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1952.45

Baron Morimashi Taki (1829–1914) was one of the first Japanese to begin collecting what the Japanese themselves often considered craft rather than art. He recognized that wonderful handmade objects—such as baskets, fabrics, sagemono, and netsuke—were true works of art and should be preserved for the heritage of Japan. This netsuke, showing two Heian Period (794–1185) members of the emperor's court sharing a poem card, was once part of the Baron's collection.



34 Warrior and helmet

Early 19th century

Wood with horn and stag antler inlays; h. 2 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (6.0 cm)

Unsigned

Gift of Richard R. Silverman in the year 2000 in memory of his brother Irwin Silverman; 2000.

This fierce warrior wears the elaborate helmet favored by feudal lords and their vassals in the Momoyama Period (1568–1600). The intricate helmet is carved with monsters around the top and plant forms on the neck guards. The story of how the collector came to acquire this netsuke is truly remarkable. The netsuke was made in two pieces, and sometime after 1913, when it was sold from the collection of the London collector W. L. Behrens, they were separated. Richard Silverman discovered the head in Toledo in 1974 and six years later found the helmet in Los Angeles—a chance in a million for the two pieces to be re-united!

35 Kagamibuta with figure in a boat

Mid 19th century

Stoneware; d. 1 1/4 in. (3.2 cm)

Inscribed: Kameyama (name of kiln)

Gift of Richard R. Silverman; 1991.89

This kagamibuta netsuke is rare for several reasons. Fragile ceramic netsuke and inro have not often survived to the present. Kameyama was a very small kiln in Nagasaki with a limited output, which makes this netsuke rare indeed. Finally, the subject matter is most unusual for a netsuke, and is inspired by Chinese landscape painting, with a man in a boat floating under pine branches.



36 Box of shells

19th century

Ebony and mother-of-pearl; h. 1 3/16 in. (3.0 cm)

Signed: Tomokazu

Gift of W. P. Baker, 1922; 1926.113

The artist Tomokazu specialized in carving wood of all types. He worked in several cities during his long career, including Nagoya, Kyoto, and Edo. While animals were his favorite subjects, he created this netsuke as an intricate box overflowing with shells. He used mother-of-pearl to resemble incrustation on the dark ebony shells. This is the first netsuke owned by the Toledo Museum of Art and was donated in 1922 by Mr. W. P. Baker of Brooklyn, New York.





37 Manju with pine bark and leaves

19th century

Wood, lacquer, mother-of-pearl, and ivory; d. 1 1/4 in. (4.4 cm)

Unsigned

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1948.124

This netsuke is an example of the two-piece manju type, formed by two halves put together. When closed, they disguise the mount through which the silk suspension cord is threaded. The bark of a pine tree is carved out of one side of this netsuke, with the pine needles applied in black and red lacquer. Three falling leaves are superimposed over the tree trunk: two mother-of-pearl leaves and one ivory leaf that has been stained green.



38 Kagamibuta with grasshopper

19th century

Ivory with gold foil and bronze; d. 1 1/8 in. (4.1 cm)

Unsigned

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1948.157

The subject depicted is that of a series of clouds, designed after Chinese models, surrounding the heavy gold foil lid which has a black bronze grasshopper who seems to float in the midst of embossed pine needles. This elegant netsuke might have been the perfect accessory for a wealthy man's autumn wardrobe.

39 Ryusa netsuke

19th century

Walrus tusk; d. 1 1/2 in. (3.8 cm)

Unsigned

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1950.91

The odd assortment of things carved on this netsuke—including a bat, a wave, a fan, a yak tail, a scroll, and a mushroom—symbolizes longevity, wisdom, and happiness for the man who wore it. The finest netsuke carvers were commissioned for works such as this one, but as the demand for netsuke reached its peak in the nineteenth century, many were mass produced by lesser artisans to satisfy the market.



40 Porcelain gourd

19th century

Ceramic with colored glazes; h. 2 1/16 in. (5.2 cm)

Unsigned: Hirado kiln?

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1950.114

Ceramic netsuke are uncommon because of their fragility and are highly desired by collectors. Gourds were sometimes used as sagemono, the containers held in place by netsuke, to hold powdered medicines or perfume. This porcelain gourd, which is the color of an eggplant, has a rare image of a lizard crawling across its surface, bugs being much more typical. Gourds and eggplants are both symbols of fertility.





41 Hako with mushrooms and maple leaves

19th century

Lacquer; w. 1 1/4 in. (3.2 cm)

Unsigned

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1950.111

This black lacquer hako, or box-shaped netsuke, is embellished with designs of maple leaves and mushrooms, both suggesting the autumn season. Mushrooms are emblems of fertility and long life, and the beauty of maple leaves was so appreciated that maple leaf viewing parties in the fall season were very popular during the Edo Period.



42 Manju with chrysanthemum blossom

Edo Period (1615–1868)

Lacquer and gold; d. 1 11/16 in. (4.3 cm)

Unsigned

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1950.97

Chrysanthemums have been grown and admired in Japan and China for thousands of years. The first recorded Japanese chrysanthemum-viewing party was held on the ninth day of the ninth month in the year 685 and was attended by the emperor. It was held as a way to stay healthy, as the flowers were thought to have healing properties. Since the flowers bloom in the fall when most of the rest of the plant world is dying, the chrysanthemum is a symbol of longevity. This netsuke is made of gold lacquer; that is, gold dust was saturated in the clear lacquer, creating a spectacular effect. The design is further enhanced by small cut pieces of gold applied to the netsuke and then lacquered over to create a smooth surface.

43 Manju with reishi

Mid 19th century

Ivory and stag antler; d. 1 $\frac{5}{8}$ in. (4.1 cm)

Signed: Kokusai

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1948.118

Kokusai is the most well-known carver who worked in the Asakusa School, which was located in an artistic quarter of Edo during the middle of the nineteenth century. His unique netsuke are often unconventional, and he was a specialist in the use of ivory and antler. This manju, or round netsuke, shows two reishi fungi, a kind of tree mushroom, in the center. A most unusual, elegant staining treatment is applied to the bowl.



44 Mask of an old man

Edo Period (1615–1868)

Stag antler with inlaid brass eyes; h. 1 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (4.8 cm)

Unsigned

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1948.153

The Noh form of theater developed in the fourteenth century from two earlier types, Gigaku and Bugaku, both Buddhist religious dances. Masks were used in all forms of these theatrical morality plays. In the Edo Period, netsuke masks became quite popular and reproduced the stock characters of Noh theater. This is an excellent example of a Jo (meaning old man) mask, a general term used to describe all old men characters in a Noh play. More specifically, the mask could be that of Shiwajo, a frowning old man with a short beard under his chin. The carver used brass nails for the eyes of the netsuke—full-size Noh masks usually had holes for the actor's eyes.





45 Mask of Okame

Late 19th century

Ivory; h. 1 $\frac{9}{16}$ in. (4.0 cm)

Signed: Gyokuzan

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1948.152

Gyokuzan was an artist who worked in both Edo and Kyoto and is known to have created several masks of the Shinto goddess of laughter, Okame. She was an important character in Noh drama, and legend has it that her comical dance coaxed Amaterasu, the sun goddess, out of her cave, bringing light to the world. Her puffy cheeks, black hair, and red lips make Okame easily recognizable, and she is a favorite subject of netsuke carvers.



46 Masked child beating a drum

19th century

Wood and ivory; h. 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (3.2 cm)

Signed: Jugyoku

Bequest of Noah H. Swayne, 1922; 1927.123

New Year's festivals in Japan always include shishimai, or lion dances, which began as part of Gigaku Buddhist religious dances and then were danced in the Noh drama. This wonderful netsuke shows a child beating a drum with a shishi mask over his head. His happy face can be seen peering out from the jaws of the lion.

47 Hako with Chinese servant

19th century

Lacquer; h. 1 ⁷/₁₆ in. (3.6 cm)

Unsigned

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1948.137

This lacquered wood hako, or box-shaped netsuke, is unusual because it was also inlaid with iridescent shell and gold foil. It depicts a happy Chinese boy, usually referred to by the Japanese as Karako, who is busily carrying scrolls and a wine bottle.



48 Chinese archer

Early 19th century

Ivory; h. 2 ¹¹/₁₆ in. (6.8 cm)

Unsigned

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1948.150

The cloud-patterned clothes, hat, and facial features identify this figure as Chinese. His bow is slung over one shoulder, and the quiver with arrows is strapped to his back. What appears to be a round shield in one hand is actually his outlandish hat. The Japanese were practically cut off from the rest of the world from the middle of the seventeenth to the middle of the nineteenth centuries, but they had a keen interest in portraying foreigners.





49 Serving spoons with netsuke attached as handles

18th–19th century

Ivory and silver; h. 9 ⁵/₈ in. (24.4 cm) and h. 9 ⁷/₁₆ in. (23.9 cm)

Unsigned

Gift of Richard R. Silverman; 1988.47 and 1988.48

This pair of spoons uses netsuke in a unique way by attaching them as handles. The netsuke, which depict a Chinese man carrying a child and a Dutchman holding a rooster, were carved in Japan in the eighteenth century. The spoons were made in London in 1897 or 1898 by the well-known silversmiths Slater, Slater, and Holland. Japan had such limited contact with the outside world from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries that foreigners were fascinating subjects for Japanese carvers. Images of these strangers were based on hearsay and imagination. There is one other set of such objects owned by a European museum according to the donor.



50 Foreigner

Mid 19th century

Ivory; h. 1 ⁷/₁₆ in. (3.6 cm.)

Signed: Kosen

Gift of H. A. Fee; 1948.159

This delightful katabori netsuke by Kosen from Osaka shows a foreigner cleaning a large jar. One expert has identified him as the Portuguese merchant Fernandes Mendes Pinto. The Portuguese, who began coming to Japan in the sixteenth century, were among the first western Europeans to trade with Japan. The long inscription on the jar translates as "Brought to the land of the rising sun [i.e., Japan] in the fifth month of the first year of Tembun [i.e., 1532]."

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Concordance by Accession Number

At the Toledo Museum of Art the accession numbers can be decoded as follows: the four digits to the left of the period represent the year in which the object was accessioned. The digits following the period indicate the sequence of accession with the year. E.g., 1950.88 indicates the eighty-eighth work accessioned in 1950. Numbers in the right column refer to catalogue numbers, except for "T" numbers which refer to the netsuke types described and illustrated on pp. 14 and 15.

1926.113	36	1948.157	38	1950.141	21
1927.114	3	1948.159	50	1950.143	11
1927.117	1	1948.161	23	1950.144	20
1927.120	25	1948.162	5	1950.146	T-5
1927.123	46	1948.166	7	1950.150	30
1928.151	14	1948.169	28	1950.161	19
1928.155	12	1948.181	27	1950.167	9
1948.117	26	1948.183	T-6	1950.171	8
1948.118	43	1950.86	17	1950.173	T-4
1948.124	37	1950.91	39	1950.78	18
1948.126	16	1950.97	42	1950.80	T-2
1948.129	T-1	1950.103	T-3	1950.81	29
1948.137	47	1950.104	32	1952.45	33
1948.140	15	1950.111	41	1952.46	2
1948.142	28	1950.113	31	1952.47	T-8
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